THE 2026 COUNTRY WEEK SPEAKING AND DEBATING AWARDS

INFORMATION FOR THE OWN COMPOSITION AND PERFORMANCE PIECE CATEGORIES

Students may compete in one category only, unless their debate team has only 3 members.
In this case, one student may compete in both categories.

OWN COMPOSITION

Each competitor is to deliver a <u>MEMORISED</u> piece that THEY HAVE WRITTEN, on a subject they have chosen. Students may not present an Own Composition they have previously presented at these Awards.

The piece may contain ideas from various sources but must be spoken in the student's own words. Students MAY NOT use a speech they have found on the internet, or anywhere else, and adapt it - the speech must be an ORIGINAL composition by the student delivering it.

The speech must be typed and a copy provided for the adjudicators. The student and speech coordinator must sign the **Own Composition Declaration** which is to be **stapled** to the **typed** speech. The Own Composition Declaration is available on the SSWA website.

The use of bad language/swearing/profanities is not acceptable. The adjudicators reserve the right to stop any presenter using bad language/swearing/profanities and disqualify that presenter.

No props may be used

Length of Speech:
- A Division – no longer than 5 minutes
- B & C Divisions - no longer than 4 minutes

Students will be called forward by an adjudicator and are NOT required to introduce themselves but MUST outline their topic and their reason for talking about it in 30 seconds. The timer will time each student's outline. A double bell will be rung to indicate that the introduction time is finished.

There must be a clear break between outlining the topic and beginning the presentation. Timing will begin again at the start of the presentation and finish when the speaker stops speaking and will be recorded.

Please note:
- students <u>MUST LEARN</u> their speech — in previous years there has been too much reliance on palm cards and those used were too large.
- small palm cards may be used for reference ONLY.
- the speech does not have to be delivered word for word as per the script provided.
- each speech MUST be entertaining and engage the audience.
- factual speeches need to have 'relief' within them.
- students should be very careful with their choice of topic — they should make sure that it engrosses them.
- students should be confident.
- movement and gestures should be minimal.
- students MUST wear formal school uniform (not the school Country Week tracksuit)
- students are advised to deliver a simple, entertaining speech.
- speeches should NOT lean toward acting.
- it is highly recommended that students practice in front of a mirror.

NOTES TO HELP PREPARE OWN COMPOSITION

Content and Ideas
- the topic is used to inform, persuade or share a viewpoint.
- a topic that is likely to provide new insights for the audience will be more appealing than a topic which adolescents are already familiar, provided it is not too obscure.
- there should be at least one original point of view presented if the topic is familiar to the audience.

Structure (Includes Introduction and Conclusion)
- outline your topic and reason for talking about it in 30 seconds BEFORE you start to deliver your speech (NOTE: see previous page).
- points need to be clearly stated and are best supported by appropriate and interesting use of examples.
- avoid long-winded explanations.
- finish with a clear concluding statement so that the audience is aware the presentation has finished.
- stand confidently and quietly for several seconds at the end of the presentation before leaving the stage.

Language, Expression and Style
- should be appropriate to the topic, the audience and the situation.
- the use of colloquialisms may be appropriate to the topic but should only be used to illustrate or enliven the talk, rather than dominating the presentation.
- jargon particular to the topic should be well contextualised or simply explained.
- should be used with confidence.
- should be appropriate to the setting and the age group of most the audience.

Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication Skills
- the presence of a speaker in front of a live audience depends as much on the body as on the voice: the ways in which the speaker stands, moves, gestures and makes eye contact are all important for the communication of the message.
- a calm and relaxed, but not sloppy, stance suggests confidence and authority.
- natural use of gesture can enliven the presentation and underline a point very effectively.
- eye contact with the audience involves the audience in the topic and shows that the speaker is communicating with them.
- unnecessary or unrelated movements and gestures, fidgeting and pacing are unnecessarily distracting.
- make sure you can be heard clearly in a space at least the size of a large classroom.
- vary the pace, pitch and tone to avoid a monotonous delivery.
- variations in pitch and tone should flow naturally from your involvement with the topic.
- the speed of delivery and the use of pause, when used well, will be highly significant in communicating your message.
- use of light and shade with the voice is essential — it is possible to deliver a quiet part of a speech without lowering the volume of the voice.

Audience Engagement

- you need to be genuinely interested in, and fully familiar with, the chosen topic.
- the presentation will be successful to the extent that the audience becomes involved with the message.
- it is important to have a sense of the audience and to speak directly to them.
- a confident manner, which comes from sound preparation as well as enthusiasm for the topic, will help to ensure that the audience enjoys the presentation.
- the level of energy is most important, and time to relax before the presentation can make a big difference.

PENALTIES: will be deducted by one adjudicator only

- 0.5 point for not wearing formal school uniform (not the school Country Week tracksuit) or for wearing a costume
- 1 point per minute for speaking for more than 1 minute to a maximum of 2 minutes over time.
- Entrants who speak for more than 3 minutes over time will be disqualified.
- 1 point for not speaking for half of the maximum allocated time.
- 1 point for using palm cards that are larger than the palm.
- 1 point for using a prop.

PENALTIES FOR READING FROM / OVERUSE OF PALM CARDS:

- A Division - 3 points
- B & C Divisions - 2 points

PLEASE NOTE THAT: In each session, all students delivering an Own Composition will be required to sit at the front of the seating.

PERFORMANCE PIECE

Each competitor is to deliver a **MEMORISED** performance in which simple props may be used. The piece should stand alone, as well as be entertaining and appropriate to the age and experience of the student and audience. <mark>Students may not present a Performance Piece they have previously presented at these Awards</mark>.

Length of Performance:
- A Division – no shorter than 2.5 and no longer than 3.5 minutes
- B & C Divisions – no shorter than 2 and no longer than 3 minutes

Students should select a performance piece which will enable them to build their performance, drawing on an understanding of character. Stand-alone Performance Pieces (for example, those written as one-off acting exercises) can limit candidates.

The Performance Piece should be from a published text or script, and in the case of a play, by a recognized playwright whose works have been produced by one or more professional theatre companies. A film script can be counted as a published play script, but the sense of theatrical convention expected in a Performance Piece should be apparent in the chosen excerpt.

The Performance Piece must be **typed**. It can be edited from the original published version. A copy of both the original the edited Performance Piece is to be provided for the adjudicators with the Performance Piece Cover Page. Publication details of the Performance Piece to be presented must be included on the cover page. Performance Piece Cover page is available on SSWA website.

NOTE:
- **You MUST NOT USE self-published, amateur and / or unknown playwrights / writers.**
- **You are encouraged to NOT use a performance piece from the internet.**
- **POETRY is not permitted.**
- **The use of bad language/swearing/profanities is not acceptable. Scripts MUST be edited to remove such language. The adjudicators reserve the right to stop any presenter using bad language/swearing/profanities and disqualify that presenter.**

Students will be called forward by an adjudicator and are NOT required to introduce themselves but have 30 seconds to set the scene for their performance. The timer will time each student's scene setting. A double bell will be rung to indicate that the time for setting the scene is finished.

There must be a clear break between setting the scene and the beginning of the Performance Piece.

Timing will begin again at the start of the performance and finish when the speaker stops speaking and will be recorded.

PLEASE NOTE:
- **COSTUME OR STAGE BLACK MUST be** worn, but neither attracts points. However, 2 points will be deducted for not wearing costume or stage black.
- **PALM CARDS ARE NOT** permitted, nor is any written material which could be used for prompting.

- A table and a chair will be provided for use as a prop. If required, they must be set up by a member of their team as soon as the previous speaker has left the stage and MUST be removed at the end of the performance.

NOTES TO HELP PREPARE <u>PERFORMANCE PIECE</u>

Introduction (not marked)
- the purpose of the introduction is to set the scene for the piece to enable the audience to understand the performance and should focus on the context of the passage rather than trying to explain it.
- the source of the piece should be included as part of the introduction.
- a sense of why the passage was chosen should be included.

Voice
- should be audible, clear and appropriate to character and dramatic action.
- it important to vary pace, pitch and tone so that the sense and emotion of the piece are clearly communicated.
- use of light and shade with the voice is essential — it is possible to deliver a quiet part of a monologue without lowering the volume of the voice.
- phrasing is important for communicating the meaning — it is a good idea to mark the copy of the script while it is being learnt, so that inflection and pause are incorporated in the right places.
- correct pronunciation and syllable stress are essential if the writer's words are to be properly understood.

Movement
- movements should be appropriate to the script and should be planned and rehearsed, preferably in front of someone who can advise what works well, because unnecessary movement can distract the audience.
- the presentation should not be too static or cover too much ground.
- effective and creative use of the depth of the space can help build a mood (e.g. withdrawing back from the audience, coming to the front to be confrontational, giving a sensation of stillness…).
- changing levels can be an effective tool.

Language
- the whole piece must be memorized — prompting interrupts the character, which will affect delivery and will cause marks to be lost.
- correct pronunciation and syllable stress are essential if the writer's words are to be properly understood.
- it is important to distinguish vocally between narrative passages and passages of dialogue.
- the speed of delivery needs to be well rehearsed, as a significant amount of the meaning can be lost if the performer delivers the lines too quickly — something which can easily happen just through nervousness.

Characterisation

- the purpose of any performance is to communicate with an audience and the presentation will be successful to the extent that this is done, therefore characterisation for audience impact and engagement is of the utmost importance.
- it is important to show the audience that you want to involve them — be theatrical, rather than personal, in presentation.
- confidence, which comes from thorough preparation, and a whole-hearted interpretation of the piece, are both important for engaging the audience.
- the level of energy is very important, and time to relax before the presentation can make a big difference.
- movement and gesture:
    - should be limited and should not distract from the vocal presentation.
    - can be used to underline the theme of the passage, increase the emotional impact and involve the audience more fully.
    - unnecessary, unrelated and repetitive gestures and hand movements can distract the audience, so these should be decided before your presentation.
    - it is important to act out the piece using the body as well as the voice.
- it is important to create a vivid character.
- it is possible to have comic interludes in a serious piece or serious moments in a comic piece, but these elements should be well under the control of the performer — it can be disappointing for performer and audience alike if these moments are misinterpreted.
- the intensity of the performance needs to match the intensity of the piece — for example, a tense, exciting piece will receive a different treatment from a gentle amusing piece.

Penalties:

- 5 points for presenting a piece that is not within the guidelines
- 2 points for not wearing a costume or stage black
- 1 point per minute for speaking over time by more than 30 seconds to a maximum of 60 seconds. Entrants who speak over time by more than 90 seconds will be disqualified.
- 1 point for not speaking for half of the allocated time
- 0.5 points for not removing staging used
- A div 3 points and B Div 2 points for using palm cards or written material which could be used for prompting

PENALTY for USING PALM CARDS or WRITTEN MATERIAL WHICH COULD BE USED FOR PROMPTING:
- A Division - 3 points
- B & C Divisions - 2 points

PLEASE NOTE: In each session, all students delivering a Performance Piece will be required to sit at the front of the seating.